



House expels New York Rep. George Santos. It's just the sixth expulsion in the chamber's history

By Kevin Freking
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted on Friday to expel Republican Rep. George Santos of New York after a blistering ethics report on his conduct heightened lawmakers' concerns about the scandal-plagued freshman. Santos became just the sixth member in the chamber's history to be ousted by colleagues, and the third since the Civil War. The vote to expel was 311-114, easily clearing the two-thirds majority required. House Republican leaders opposed removing Santos, whose departure leaves them with a razor-thin majority, but in the end 105 GOP lawmakers sided with nearly all Democrats to expel him. The expulsion marked the final congressional chapter in a spectacular fall from grace for Santos. Celebrated as an up-and-comer after he flipped a district from Democrats last year, Santos' life story began to unravel before he was even sworn into office. Reports emerged that he had lied about having Jewish ancestry, a career at top Wall Street firms and a college degree, among other things.



Rep. George Santos, R-N.Y., leaves the Capitol after being expelled from the House of Representatives, Friday, Dec. 1, 2023, in Washington.

(AP Photo/Stephanie Scarbrough)
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Continued from Front

Then, in May, Santos was indicted by federal prosecutors on multiple charges, turning his presence in the House into a growing distraction and embarrassment to the party.

Santos joins a short list of lawmakers expelled from the House, and for reasons uniquely his own. Of the previous expulsions in the House, three were for siding with the Confederacy during the Civil War. The remaining two occurred after the lawmakers were convicted of crimes in federal court, the most recent in 2002.

Seeking to remain in office, Santos had appealed to colleagues to let the court process play out. He warned of the precedent they would set by expelling a member not yet convicted of a crime.

"This will haunt them in the future," Santos told lawmakers on Thursday evening as they debated his removal.

As it became clear Friday that he would be expelled, Santos appeared resigned to his fate. He placed his overcoat over his shoulders and shook hands with conservative members who voted against his expulsion. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who voted against expelling



Rep. George Santos, R-N.Y., leaves the Capitol after being expelled from the House of Representatives, Friday, Dec. 1, 2023, in Washington.

(AP Photo/Stephanie Scarbrough)

Santos, was solemn as he announced the result of the vote and declared the New York seat vacant.

Outside the Capitol, trailed by a crush of reporters and cameras, he quickly ducked inside a vehicle and left.

Santos' fellow Republicans from New York were front and center in the effort to boot him. Among them were fellow freshmen who serve in key swing districts and had helped the GOP take the House majority. They sought to generate as much political distance as they could from Santos, whose lies about his past made him a pariah in the House before he even took the oath of office.

Rep. Anthony D'Esposito, whose district is next to Santos', led the debate for

expulsion and argued that voters would welcome lawmakers holding themselves to a high standard. Another New York Republican, Rep. Nick Langworthy, said Santos had only himself to blame.

"Every precedent under the sun has been broken by George Santos," Langworthy said. "Has there ever been anyone here that's made up a whole life?"

Santos had survived two previous expulsion attempts, but a scathing House Ethics Committee report released the week before the Thanksgiving holiday appeared to turn colleagues decisively against him.

After eight months of work, Ethics Committee investigators said they had found "overwhelming evidence"

that Santos had broken the law and exploited his public position for his own profit.

"It's a solemn day," said the chairman of the ethics panel, Rep. Michael Guest, R-Miss. "I mean no one wants to have to remove a member from Congress. But the allegations against him, the evidence was overwhelming." Rep. Susan Wild, the top Democrat on the Ethics Committee, reminded members that the decision approving the investigators' findings was unanimous.

"Mr. Santos is not a victim," Wild said. "He is a perpetrator of a massive fraud on his constituents and the American people."

Santos' troubles are far from over, as he faces trial next year in New York. Federal prosecutors in a 23-count indictment have accused him of duping donors, stealing from his campaign and lying to Congress.

The indictment alleges specifically that Santos stole the identities of campaign donors and then used their credit cards to make tens of thousands of dollars in unauthorized charges. He then wired some of the money to his personal bank account and used the rest to pad his campaign coffers, prosecutors say. Santos has pleaded not guilty, Santos' expulsion narrows the GOP's majority to 221-

213 and Democrats will have a good opportunity to fill the vacancy. Shortly after the vote, Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, said she's prepared to call a special election for the seat, likely in mid-to-late February under a time-frame set by state law.

"When you look at his lack of ethics and the fact that, you know, he has not served the people of our state, particularly New York 3 where he resides, it's been an abysmal run for him," Hochul said Friday.

The special election will kick off a hotly contested year of congressional races in New York as Democrats look to flip a handful of seats in the state and retake control of the House. The field of candidates for Santos' seat is already crowded and includes former U.S. Rep. Tom Suozzi, a Democrat who represented the district before an unsuccessful run for governor last year.

Now that he has been removed from office, Santos' congressional office will remain operational under the management of the Clerk of the House. No additional staff can be hired, but the current staff can stay on and perform constituent casework. They will be unable to undertake any legislative activity, such as the drafting of bills. □



House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, center, flanked by Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., and Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., talks with reporters about efforts to investigate President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden, at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023.

(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

House Republicans reiterate their demand for Hunter Biden to appear for a private deposition

By Farnoush Amiri
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans demanded Friday that Hunter Biden appear this month for a closed-door deposition, rejecting his offer to testify publicly while pledging to release a transcript of the private interview for transparency. House Oversight Committee chair James Comer and Judiciary Committee chair Jim Jordan reiterated the pa-

rameters of the subpoena issued last month to Hunter Biden in a letter — obtained by The Associated Press — to his attorney.

The president's son had refused their request this week for closed-door testimony, saying it could be manipulated.

"The subpoenas Mr. Biden has received compel him to appear before the Committees for a deposition; they are not mere suggestions

open to Mr. Biden's interpretation or preference," the Republican chairmen wrote in a letter to attorney Abbe Lowell.

Lowell this week had called the nearly yearslong GOP investigation into his client a "fishing expedition," but offered for his client to appear publicly rather than behind closed doors, saying closed sessions can be selectively leaked and used to manipulate the facts. □

Iowa court affirms hate crime conviction of man who left anti-gay notes at homes with rainbow flags

By Steve Karnowski
Associated Press

(AP) - The Iowa Supreme Court affirmed the hate crime conviction Friday of a man who posted hand-written notes at homes with rainbow flags and emblems, urging them to "burn that gay flag."

The majority rejected the claim by Robert Clark Geddes that his conviction for trespassing as a hate crime violated his free speech rights. But a dissenting justice said a hate crime conviction wasn't appropriate since it wasn't clear if the people displaying the symbols were actually associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

As the court noted, the rainbow flag has come to symbolize support for LGBTQ+ rights. The majority said the state statute in question does not criminalize speech, but rather conduct with a specific intent — trespassing because the property owners or residents had associated themselves with a protected class.



University of Northern Iowa students up a rainbow flag before a Gay Marriage Rally at Mauker Union on the University of Northern Iowa campus, Friday, April 3, 2009, in Cedar Falls, Iowa. (Matthew Putney/The Courier via AP, File)

Handwritten notes turned up in June of 2021 taped to the front doors of five renters and homeowners in the town of Boone who displayed rainbow flags or decals. All said, "burn that gay flag." One contained additional anti-gay slurs. The

recipients told police they found the notes "alarming, annoying, and/or threatening," according to the decision.

Based on surveillance video from some of the homes, police identified Geddes as the man who left the notes,

and he acknowledged posting them. He was charged with five counts of trespassing as a hate crime. He was later convicted and was sentenced to up to two years of probation.

On appeal, Geddes argued prosecutors failed to prove

he targeted persons who were LGBTQ+ or had a connection with them. He said his conviction therefore violated his free speech rights. Iowa's hate crime law requires that the victim was targeted because of their "race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability," or because of their "association with" people in those categories.

In his dissent, Justice Matthew McDermott said there was no evidence in the record that the recipients of Geddes' notes were members of the LGBTQ+ community or whether he believed they were, nor whether any of the residents had an "association with" an actual person in those protected classes. He noted that the Legislature chose the words "association with" rather than "solidarity with" when it wrote the hate crime law. Geddes's attorney Ashley Stewart said they were disappointed in the decision. □

Philadelphia votes to ban ski masks to decrease crime. Opponents worry it'll unfairly target some

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Philadelphia City Council passed legislation to ban ski masks in some public spaces, a measure supporters say will increase public safety amid high violent crime, but opponents argue it will unfairly target people without proof of any wrongdoing.

The legislation passed on Thursday with a 13-2 vote, and now goes to Democratic Mayor Jim Kenney. A spokesperson said he would review the legislation and "looks forward to our ongoing work with City Council on the urgent matter of ensuring public safety." The measure would ban ski masks, or balaclavas, in public spaces like schools, recreation centers,

parks, city-owned buildings and on public transportation. It defines the garment as a close-fitting covering over the whole head, with holes only for the eyes, nose, or mouth.

A \$250 fine would be imposed against anyone who violates the law. It has exceptions for religious garb and protests.

The legislation comes as the nation's sixth-largest city has been beleaguered by violent crime, tallying a record number of homicides in 2021, most of them gun-related. That number fell from 562 to 516 in 2022 but was still higher than pre-pandemic levels, and advocates have said they are on track to decrease further this year.

Big cities across the na-

tion experienced spikes in crime as social supports were upended during the pandemic, though crime has started to decrease to pre-pandemic levels.

Philadelphia's move goes in the opposite direction to New York City, which relaxed a law that prohibited face coverings in public. It was meant to permit mask-wearing during the coronavirus outbreak. Supporters of the repeal said the former law also exposed men of color to police harassment and was used against protesters during demonstrations.

Concerns about theft,



A pedestrian wears a balaclava ski mask to shield from the cold air along Columbus Boulevard in Philadelphia, on Monday, Jan. 11, 2021.

(Jose F. Moreno/The Philadelphia Inquirer via AP)

even as crime decreases in the city, pushed Mayor Eric Adams, a former police officer, to suggest storeowners should refuse to admit anyone wearing a mask unless it was lowered to be picked up by store cameras.

Philadelphia's ban cites an increase in those casually wearing ski masks in 2020 — during the beginning of the pandemic — alongside a rise in individuals sought by Philadelphia police. The

ski masks conceal people's identities, making it harder for the police to identify them, supporters say. Messages were left for the bill's sponsor, Councilman Anthony Phillips.

But it drew sharp opposition from some progressive members of Council and the ACLU of Pennsylvania, which said there was no evidence to support that ski masks cause or encourage crime. □

Retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman on the Supreme Court, has died at age 93

By Mark Sherman
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, an unwavering voice of moderate conservatism and the first woman to serve on the nation's highest court, died Friday. She was 93.

O'Connor died in Phoenix, of complications related to advanced dementia and a respiratory illness, the Supreme Court said in a news release.

Chief Justice John Roberts mourned her death. "A daughter of the American Southwest, Sandra Day O'Connor blazed an historic trail as our Nation's first female Justice," Roberts said in statement issued by the court. "She met that challenge with undaunted determination, indisputable ability, and engaging candor."

In 2018, she announced that she had been diagnosed with "the beginning stages of dementia, probably Alzheimer's disease." Her husband, John O'Connor, died of complications of Alzheimer's in



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is shown before administering the oath of office to members of the Texas Supreme Court, Jan. 6, 2003, in Austin, Texas.

(AP Photo/Harry Cabluck, File)

2009.

O'Connor's nomination in 1981 by President Ronald Reagan and subsequent confirmation by the Senate ended 191 years of male exclusivity on the high court. A native of Arizona who grew up on her family's sprawling ranch,

O'Connor wasted little time building a reputation as a hard worker who wielded considerable political clout on the nine-member court. The granddaughter of a pioneer who traveled west from Vermont and founded the family ranch some three decades before Arizona

became a state, O'Connor had a tenacious, independent spirit that came naturally. As a child growing up in the remote outback, she learned early to ride horses, round up cattle and drive trucks and tractors.

"I didn't do all the things the boys did," she said in a

1981 Time magazine interview, "but I fixed windmills and repaired fences."

Following her retirement, O'Connor expressed regret that a woman had not been chosen to replace her. O'Connor remained active in the government even after she retired from the court. She sat as a judge on several federal appeals courts, advocated for judicial independence and served on the Iraq Study Group. She also was appointed to the honorary post of chancellor at the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

O'Connor cited her husband's struggle with Alzheimer's disease as her primary reason for leaving the court. After moving into an assisted living center, John O'Connor struck up a romance with a fellow Alzheimer's patient, a relationship experts say is not uncommon among people with dementia. The retired justice was relieved that he was comfortable and happy at the center, according to her son, Scott. □

Fed's Powell notes inflation is easing but downplays discussion of interest rate cuts

By Christopher Rugaber
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Inflation is slowing steadily, but it's too early to declare victory or to discuss when the Federal Reserve might cut interest rates, Chair Jerome Powell said Friday.

Speaking at Spelman College in Atlanta, Powell noted that consumer prices, excluding volatile food and energy costs, rose at just a 2.5% annual rate in the past six months. That's not far above the Fed's 2% inflation target.

Still, more progress is needed, Powell said. He added, "It would be premature to conclude with confidence" that the Fed has raised its benchmark inter-

est rate high enough to fully defeat inflation. Nor is it time to "speculate on when policy might

ease," Powell said, referring to the possibility of cuts in the Fed's benchmark interest rate, which affects

many consumer and business loans.

Instead, he said, the Fed's interest-rate-setting committee "is moving forward carefully" phrasing that analysts consider a signal that the central bank doesn't plan any changes to interest rates anytime soon.

Many Wall Street investors have recently stepped up their bets that the Fed will cut rates as early as May, according to CME Fed-watch, in part after another Fed official earlier this week appeared to open the door to rate cuts by this spring.

Still, the Fed's policymakers are expected to leave interest rates alone when

they next meet Dec. 12-13. It would be the third straight meeting in which they have kept rates at their current level. Beginning in March 2022, the Fed raised its key rate 11 times from near zero to about 5.4%, the highest level in 22 years.

Those rate hikes have made loans significantly more expensive across the economy, notably for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and business borrowing. The result has been diminished purchases of homes, cars, furniture and appliances, a trend that has slowed the economy and forced prices modestly lower in those categories. □



Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell speaks at the International Monetary Fund on Nov. 9, 2023 in Washington. Powell will appear at events at Spelman College in Atlanta today.

(AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein, File)

Putin orders the Russian military to add 170,000 troops for a total of 1.32 million

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday ordered the country's military to increase the number of troops by nearly 170,000 to a total of 1.32 million, as Moscow's military action in Ukraine continues into its 22nd month.

Putin's decree was released by the Kremlin on Friday and took force immediately. It brings the overall number of Russian military personnel to about 2.2 million, including 1.32 million troops.

It is the second such expansion of the army since 2018. The previous boost by 137,000 troops, ordered by Putin in August 2022, put the military's numbers at about 2 million personnel and about 1.15 million troops.

The Defense Ministry said the order doesn't imply any "significant expansion of conscription," saying in a statement that the increase would happen gradually by recruiting more volunteers. The ministry cited what it called "the special military operation" in Ukraine and the expansion



Russian President Vladimir Putin makes a video address to participants of the 2nd National Healthcare Congress at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Friday, Dec. 1, 2023.
(Mikhail Klimentyev, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via AP)

sion of NATO as the reasons for beefing up the army. NATO's "joint armed forces are being built up near Russia's borders and additional air defense systems and strike weapons are being deployed. The potential of NATO's tactical nuclear forces is being increased," the statement read.

Boosting Russian troops is

an appropriate response to "the aggressive activities of the NATO bloc," the ministry said.

Last December, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu declared that the country needed a force of 1.5 million "to guarantee the fulfillment of tasks to ensure Russia's security." He didn't say when the military would

reach that size.

The Kremlin previously considered the size of its military as sufficient, but the calculus changed after hopes for a quick victory over its neighbor were shattered by fierce Ukrainian resistance.

Amid the continued hostilities, Russia and Ukraine both have kept a tight lid of

secrecy on their military casualties. The Russian military has confirmed only just over 6,000 military casualties, but the West had much higher estimates. In October, the U.K. Defense Ministry tweeted in a regular update that Russia has "likely suffered 150,000-190,000 permanent casualties," a number that included troops that have been killed and permanently wounded.

The Russian authorities have undertaken various efforts to give a boost to the army. In August 2022, Putin ordered an increase in the size of the Russian military to 1.15 million starting from Jan. 1, 2023. The following month, he ordered the mobilization of 300,000 reservists to beef up his forces in Ukraine.

That number is counted as part of the military's current strength.

While Putin said there was no need to round up more, his mobilization decree is open-ended, allowing the military to call up additional reservists when needed. That decree also banned volunteer soldiers from ending their contracts. □

Preliminary Dutch government talks delayed as official seeking coalitions says he needs more time

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The official appointed to investigate possible coalitions after the Dutch election won by Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom said Friday he needs more time because of reluctance by potential partners to join Wilders in a government.

Ronald Plasterk, a former government minister from the center-left Labor Party, had been expected to present his report on possible formations early next week ahead of a Dec. 7 debate in the lower house of parliament.

But in a letter to the lower house president, Vera Berg-

kamp, he said he hopes to report back to her early in the following week. The delay comes after two



Geert Wilders, leader of the far-right party PVV, or Party for Freedom, talks to the media after a meeting with speaker of the House Vera Bergkamp, two days after Wilders won the most votes in a general election, in The Hague, Netherlands, Friday Nov. 24, 2023.
(AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

key parties backed away from joining a coalition with Wilders. The new leader of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) of outgoing prime minister Mark Rutte has said she will not join a coalition led by Wilders, but would offer it support in parliament.

Pieter Omtzigt, the leader of another potential coalition partner, New Social Contract, told Plasterk he was not yet ready to discuss forming a coalition with Wilders.

Omtzigt has previously criticized Wilders' repeated anti-Islam statements as unconstitutional. Wilders responded even before

the election by saying that his long-held plan to "de-Islamize" the Netherlands are not currently a priority. He has urged Omtzigt, VVD leader Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius and the agrarian Farmer Citizen Movement to join him in coalition talks. According to official results confirmed Friday, Wilders' Party for Freedom won 37 seats in the 150-seat lower house in the election for a clear-cut victory. An alliance of the center-left Labor Party and Green Left finished second with 25 seats followed by the VVD with 24 and New Social Contract with 20. The Farmer Citizen Movement won seven seats. □

UN court bars Venezuela from altering Guyana's control over disputed territory

By Mike Corder and Regina Garcia Cano

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — The United Nations' top court on Friday ordered Venezuela not to take any action that would alter Guyana's control over a disputed territory, but did not specifically ban Venezuela from holding its planned referendum Sunday on the territory's future. Guyana had asked the International Court of Justice to order a halt to parts of the vote, saying it was aimed at paving the way for Venezuela to annex the disputed Essequibo region, which makes up some two-thirds of Guyana.

Both countries interpreted Friday's ruling as largely backing their own positions on the territory, which is larger than Greece and is rich in oil and minerals.

The court order falls short of any explicit mention of the referendum, but says that Venezuela must "refrain from taking any action which would modify that situation that currently prevails" in Essequibo. The



A woman sells fruit in front of a mural of the Venezuelan map with the Essequibo territory included, in Caracas, Venezuela, Wednesday, Nov. 29, 2023.

(AP Photo/Matias Delacroix)

legally binding ruling remains in place until a case brought by Guyana against Venezuela on the region's future is considered by the court, which could take years.

In comments explaining the verdict, Court President Joan E. Donoghue

said that Friday's order was necessary because "Venezuela's expressed readiness to take action" on the disputed territory "at any moment following the referendum" showed that there is "a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice to Guyana's plausible right

before the court gives its final decision."

Venezuela has arranged a referendum to ask voters five questions Sunday, including whether to create a Venezuelan state in Essequibo and whether voters support granting Venezuelan citizenship to the

region's current and future residents.

Venezuela does not recognize the U.N. panel's jurisdiction over the decades-old dispute, but the country's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez nonetheless characterized the ruling as a "victory for Venezuela," given that the U.N. did not order a halt to the referendum plans.

"Guyana went looking for wool and came out sheared," Rodríguez told reporters in Caracas after the ruling was announced. Guyana President Mohamed Irfaan Ali also welcomed the ruling. He said in a statement that the decision makes clear that "Venezuela is prohibited from annexing or trespassing upon Guyanese territory or taking any other actions" altering the Essequibo's boundary set in 1899, regardless of the outcome of any referendum.

At urgent hearings in November, lawyers for Guyana said the referendum was designed to prepare for a land-grab by Venezuela. □

Authorities in Haiti hold former rebel leader Guy Philippe after the US repatriated him

By Evans Sanon

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)

— Authorities in Haiti held former rebel leader Guy Philippe on Friday at a police station where he remained a day after the the United States repatriated him to Haiti, his lawyer said. Philippe is a convicted money launderer who played a key role in the 2004 rebellion against former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and also was accused of masterminding attacks on police stations and other targets.

Philippe has an outstanding warrant stemming from a 2016 fatal attack on a police station in the southern coastal city of Les Cayes,

police officials told The Associated Press on Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity because they

were not authorized to speak to the media.

Philippe was being held under observation, that usual-



Guy Philippe smiles during an interview in Pestel, Haiti, Aug. 24, 2016. Philippe returned to Haiti on Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023, after the U.S. government deported him.

(AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery, File)

ly lasts 48 hours, but he has not been charged and no hearing has been held, attorney Jean Joseph Louicher told reporters gathered outside the police station.

"Why can't my client recover his freedom to be with his family?" Louicher said, adding that authorities only told him they did not yet have any orders to release Philippe. Louicher said Philippe is being held in a cell by himself and was given food, water and a mattress.

The former rebel leader once served as police chief for the northern coastal city of Cap-Haitien and had been recently elected to Haiti's Senate when local authorities arrested him in

Haiti in January 2017 while he participated in a live radio talk show.

He was extradited to the U.S., where he was sentenced to nine years in prison after pleading guilty to a money laundering charge. Authorities had said he used his high-ranking position within Haiti's National Police to provide protection for drug shipments in exchange for up to \$3.5 million in bribes.

Philippe, who has stated in recent interviews that he intends to be involved in his country's affairs, arrived back in Haiti as it struggles with widespread gang violence and deepening political instability. □

Aruba: the legend behind its name

(Oranjestad)—Most folkloric tales and legends in Aruba revolve around our indigenous ancestors, who came from mainland Venezuela, and discovered the island and made it into their new home. This particular legend tells the story of the birth of the Aruba name.

The legend follows the life of Arua, an indigenous Cacique originally from Aroa in the Falcon state in Venezuela in the year 50 AD. Arua had a son around the year 70 AD with his wife Shira, who they named Corobori. When Corobori was old enough, he joined his father on the usual boat trip to the islands of Curacao and Bonaire to gather salt.

On their way back to Mainland Venezuela, they were caught up in a heavy rain storm—a side effect from a passing, but far away, hurricane. Of course, because of the lack of motors and sail, their boat was left in the mercy of the heavy winds. After a while, the storm started to pass, and the clouds began to clear up. Finally able to see around them, the Cacique spotted land approximately an hour away. So, they started to row in that direction until they reached the coast.

Once they arrived on what they thought was Venezuela, they decided to stay the night and fix their kayak. The next morning, the Cacique ordered his son and a few warriors to go find any sign of population in the area: "Corobori," Arua said. "Don't come back without news. It's in your hands how long we stay here till we find our family. So, if you need to take a week to gather information, we will wait for you."

"Don't worry," Corobori replied. "As soon as we have any information, we will let you know." Armed with arrows and spears, backpacks filled with food and water containers, they set off. They climbed several small hills, but no sign of a village. They crossed different dry riverbeds, but no sign of anything. When the sun finally descended, they found themselves near a fairly tall hill and decided to climb it for a better view of a village. This hill was called Pan Dushi or Orcuyo, which today we call Hooiberg.

The next morning, they could clearly see that they have landed on an island, but an unfamiliar one at that. When Corobori went back to where his father was waiting, he told him the news: "Father Arua, you have just discovered an island, but it is not Curacao or Bonaire. Far in the south, we saw the big mountains of our homeland Venezuela, which we could have never seen on the other island. This leads us to believe we are on a new island. But that's not all. When the sun came up, we saw in the distance a glowing plain, which we think may be salt."

The Cacique was pleased to hear of his son's findings. He decided to stay a couple days on the newly-discovered island in search for salt. The next morning they ascended Hooiberg again and stayed to see if they could find nearby smoke, indicating an inhabitant village. But they found nothing. So they went back to their initial arrival settlement, now known as Santo Largo in Savaneta. The next morning they hiked along the Spaans Lagoen near the Mangel Halto Beach and reached the area of Bushiri. There, they boarded their kayaks and heading to what we know now as Malmok, where they found rocks of salt. After a couple days of exploring the island and gathering some salt rocks, they left for Venezuela, where they were reunited with their families.

Throughout the year, they travelled back and forth to Aruba, collecting salt. After a while they settled on the island, generations of families living along the coast. Corobori was the first indigenous inhabitant in our history to explore the entirety of the island.

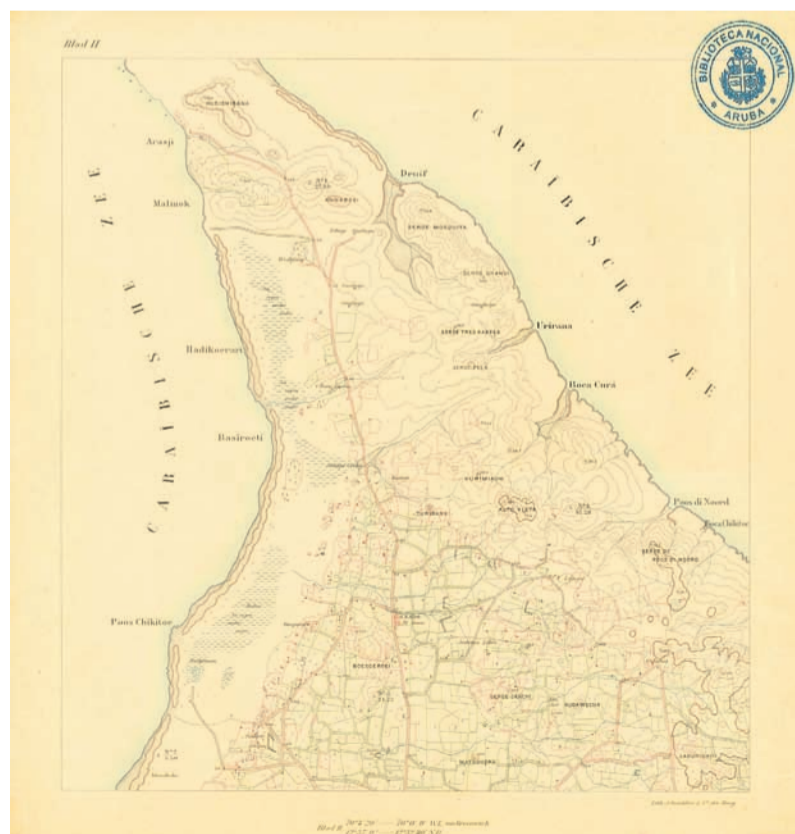
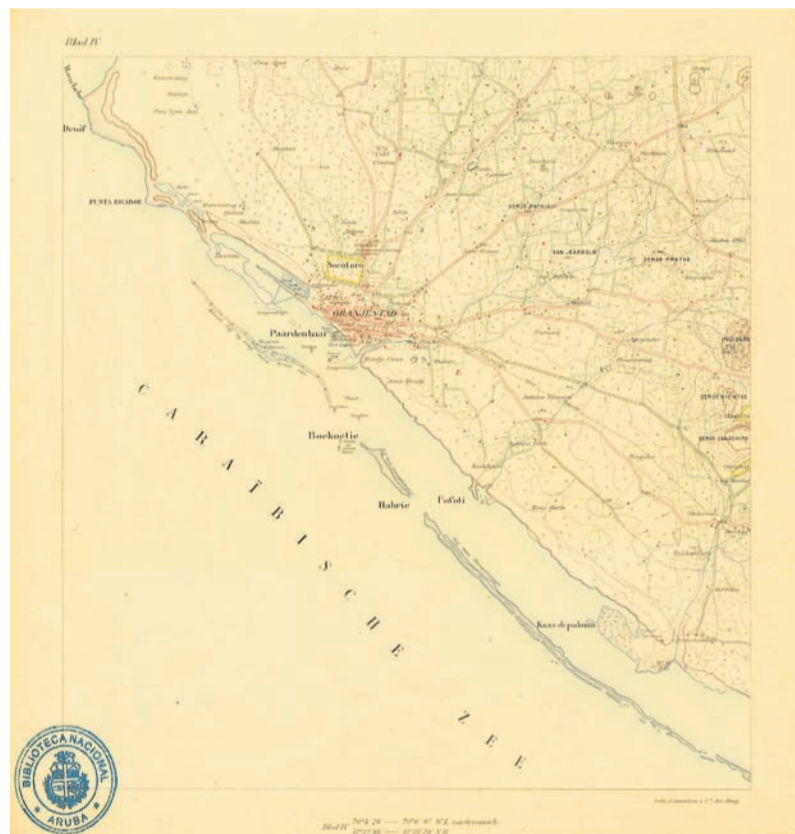
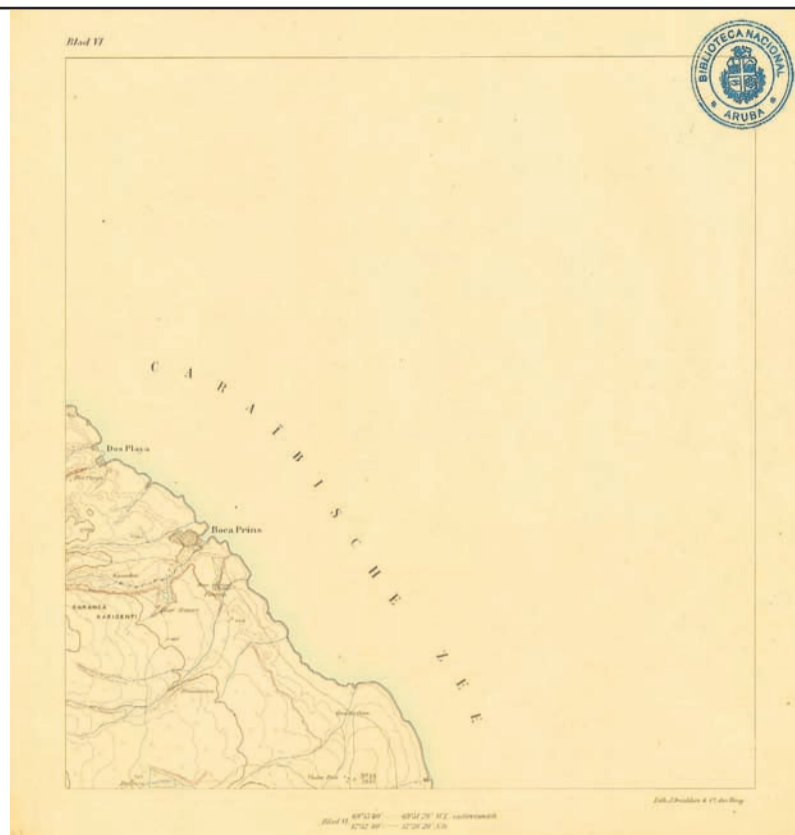
Arua, after decades as the leader of his tribe, spent his last days on the island. Having reached 80 years old, he called for his family on his death bed. In his hammock, he said: "My children, many years have passed, and I've asked my warrior to bring me back to the island so I can laid to rest. The God of living has given me the gift of life to see my son, grandchildren and great grandchildren. But now he is calling me home. Corobori, my torch is now passed to you. Guide our people, and be the leader you were always meant to become. If one day you leave my island, do not forget that it is also yours. This is my last wish: When I die, bury me in our maize plantation."

And so when the Cacique passed away, his wishes were granted and he was laid to rest in the area we now know as the Paradera Cemetery. Where he used to live, they built the Paradera Church.

And that is the tale of what inspired the Aruba name. In the generations that lived or travelled back and forth to the island, there were many familiar names*, like Guadiriki, a warrior who was there when the island got discovered and his son, whom he called Huliba; Corobori and his children, Corodori, Camacuri and Turibana, Masiduri; and Malmok, the 13-year-old boy who alerted the Cacique when the Caribes attacked.

Familiar names: all these names are familiar to Arubans, as these are the names of places and plants on the island. □

Source: Un storia di e Indjan Arua (A story of the Indian Arua) by Adolf (Dufi) Kock



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(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to

the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhal-

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

ing too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror,

he noticed that the there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they real-

ized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling. □

Source: visitaruba.com

Why You Should Not Miss Aruba's Free City Center Street Car Tour

ORANJESTAD - Aruba's City Center Street Car - or as we call it in Dutch; "Tram van Oranjestad" - is a single track tram line in Oranjestad, the capital city of Aruba. It was inaugurated on 22 December 2012, being the first and so far the only passenger rail service on Aruba and the rest of the Dutch Caribbean. There are two trolleys, a single-deck one with 42 seats and a double-decker with 64 seats. The line was inspired by the popular battery-powered streetcar operation at the Grove in Los Angeles, USA. Aruba's streetcars are powered by hydrogen fuel cells, which are charged by the island's year-round trade winds.

Caya Betico Croes, mostly referred to as our "main street" has been developed into a pollution-

free pedestrian mall. The double-decker offers you a 360 degree view of the down town area with a picture perfect scenery of the island's clear blue skies. Who would not enjoy a ride on this beautiful and naturally air-conditioned vehicle? The tour consists of a total of 9 stops approximately 200 meters apart from each other; all stops are clearly marked. The tram will bring you close to different museums, historical plazas, monuments, the Protestant church, Aruba's high-end mall, retail shops, and a variety of local and international cuisine restaurants. The "I love Aruba" trademark also belongs to that list. The third stop on the route is close to a 5-minute walk to the famous Renaissance Marina showcasing luxurious yachts and Aruba's blue

waters.

The "Tram van Oranjestad" starts from a balloon loop near the Port of Call and serves the downtown area and ends at Plaza Nicky. The

first ride starts at 10:00 am sharp with intervals of 25minutes. The last trolley departs from the cruise port at 5:00pm. Don't miss this tour of the beautiful Aruba's City Center—it is free for all! □



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Play Responsibly. Visit www.gamblersanonymous.org if you or someone you know has a gambling problem.**Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort!**

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure to recognize Distinguished Visitors of Aruba. These Distinguished Visitors were respectively honored with certificates acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels are as follows:
Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:

Distinguished Visitors Mr. Gary & Mrs. Dawn Mazzochi from South Carolina, United States and Distinguished Visitors Mr. Lawrence & Mrs. Camille Marcotrigiano from New Jersey, United States.

Ms. Kimberley Richardson representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort bestowed the Distinguished Visitor certificates to the



honorees, presented them with gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by Mr. & Mrs. Mazzochi were:
Aruba's beautiful beaches
Aruba's great weather
Aruba's friendly people
Aruba's variety of restaurants to choose from
Aruba's safety

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by Mr. & Mrs. Marcotrigiano
Aruba's people!
Aruba's safety
Aruba's hospitality
"The food is excellent"
"Aruba is our home away from home"

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island". ☐

**Aruba to me**

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive?

Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we

strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from **Irene Sulewski from Berlin, CT USA.**

She wrote to us saying: "Aruba to me is the gathering of family and friends in paradise."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! ☐

Aruba's underwater wonderland



ORANJESTAD - Exploring the underwater wonders is something you should definitely do during your stay in Aruba. The underwater world has everything to offer that makes a snorkel trip so exceptional; an impressive, colorful sea life with exotic fishes, turtles and beautiful coral reef. The historic shipwrecks, located on the Aruban seabed are also worth a visit. Aruba is known for its white beaches and blue oceans, which means there are many fascinating under water spots, where you can take your snorkeling gear and we selected the top spots for you.

Tres Trapi

Tres Trapi means tree steps

in Papiamentu, Papiamentu is together with Dutch the official language spoken on Aruba. The beach is called Tres Trapi because it is accessible by the tree steps carved into the rocks. Tres Trapi is a small rocky beach, located on the north-western side of the island, approximately 5 to 10 minute drive from Palm Beach. From the unique steps you can easily walk over the beach into the clear and turquoise blue ocean. While snorkeling you will encounter all kind of tropical fishes and sea stars. The kind of starfish you will find in the Aruban waters is the red cushion sea star. This is a starfish that is commonly found in the

shallow waters of the Caribbean sea and if you are lucky during your snorkeling visit to Tres Trapi, you may come across one of the green sea turtles. Respect the animal, keep your distance and enjoy the view. Also remember; it is a once in a life time experience.

Antilla shipwreck

Antilla is a 400-foot-long long ship, built in 1939 in Hamburg, Germany. Antilla came to Aruba, because it had to find a neutral port. When Germany invaded the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, the crew decided to let their own ship sink, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Dutch Navy. Antilla lies on its port-



side in Malmok bay, and the sunken world war two ship is now one of Aruba's most popular snorkeling and dive spots. However, the ship wreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes, but the ship wreck alone is already impressive enough.

Baby Beach

Baby beach; a white beach, with a crystal blue ocean. The beach is located on the southern part of the island. On the way to the famous beach, you will drive through the old capital of Aruba, San Nicolas. The old Aruban culture can be still felt and experienced here, so do not hesitate to get out of your car and walk around for a while. Baby beach is a child friendly beach, since it is shallow and the water has a pleasant temperature. The name therefore fits well with the beach. Baby beach is an excellent beach for snorkeling, especially if you want to go with small children, because the water remains shallow and

there are still many underwater wonders to see. In the ocean there is an area marked until where it is recommended to snorkel and on the beach you will find different facilities. It is a perfect beach to spend your day snorkeling and relaxing.

Mangel Halto

Mangel Halto beach is located in Savaneta, on the southern-west part of the island. The beach is different from the other beaches in Aruba; it is beach full of mangroves. You reach the beach by a bridge through the mangroves and then you will have several entrances to the sea. There are diverse spots where you can enjoy a perfect beach day, wooden stairs made to enter the water and a dock to sit on and enjoy the view. Mangel Halto is also worth a visit for the snorkeling experience. Inside the bay, the water is clear and you find many colorful fish. Outside the bay is a bit more challenging for beginners because of the wind and the waves, but the coral is alive and it is just like snorkel heaven.□



Unique fauna of Aruba

For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

Cascabel (rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The en-

emies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.

Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the Shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid – a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is

simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets – and humans through destruction of their habitat.

Prikichi (parakeet, *Aratinga pertinax*)

The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

Conew (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Conew, has spread all over the island and has become



part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Conew can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.

The Aruban Conew has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Conew is an endangered species and

protected by Aruban law. The Conew is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Conew can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. Sadly, the Boas are back on the rise again with the truly wet rainy seasons we have recently experienced. This could cause a new decline in the Conew population that was just starting to recover.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. For more information, visit <https://www.arubanationalpark.org/main/flora-fauna/>



Illinois appeals court affirms actor Jussie Smollett's convictions and jail sentence

By Ed White

Associated Press

(AP) - An appeals court upheld the disorderly conduct convictions Friday of actor Jussie Smollett, who was accused of staging a racist, homophobic attack against himself in 2019 and lying about it to Chicago police.

Smollett, who appeared in the TV show "Empire," challenged the role of a special prosecutor, jury selection, evidence and many other aspects of the case. But all were turned aside in a 2-1 opinion from the Illinois Appellate Court.

Smollett had reported to police that he was the victim of a racist and homophobic attack by two men wearing ski masks. The search for the attackers soon turned into an investigation of Smollett himself, leading to his arrest on charges he had orchestrated the whole thing.

Authorities said he paid two men whom he knew from



Jussie Smollett arrives at the BET Awards, June 26, 2022, in Los Angeles.

(Photo by Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP, File)

work on "Empire," which filmed in Chicago. Prosecutors said Smollett told the men what slurs to shout, and to yell that he was in "MAGA Country," a reference to Donald Trump's presidential campaign slogan.

A jury convicted Smollett in 2021 on five felony counts of disorderly conduct, a charge that can be filed in Illinois when a person lies to police. He now will have to finish a 150-day stint in jail that was

part of his sentence. Smollett spent just six days in jail while his appeal was pending.

A message seeking comment from his attorney, Nonye Uche, was not immediately returned. Lawyers for

Smollett, who is Black and gay, have publicly claimed that he was the target of a racist justice system and people playing politics.

Appellate Justice Fredrena Lyle would have thrown out the convictions. She said it was "fundamentally unfair" to appoint a special prosecutor and charge Smollett when he had already performed community service as part of a 2019 deal with Cook County prosecutors to close the case.

"It was common sense that Smollett was bargaining for a complete resolution of the matter, not simply a temporary one," Lyle said. Special prosecutor Dan Webb was appointed to look into why the case was dropped. A grand jury subsequently restored charges against Smollett in 2020, and Webb concluded there were "substantial abuses of discretion" in the state's attorney office during the earlier round. □

Family of Marine killed in Afghanistan fails to win lawsuit against Alec Baldwin

By Mead Gruver

Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Alec Baldwin didn't have to pay anything to resolve a \$25 million lawsuit filed by family members of a Marine killed in Afghanistan after the actor chastised them on social media over the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrec-

tion at the U.S. Capitol, Baldwin's attorney said. U.S. Southern District of New York Judge Edgardo Ramos in August dismissed the lawsuit sought by the wife and sisters of Lance Cpl. Rylee McCollum, of Jackson, Wyoming. When the McCollum family didn't file an amended lawsuit as

Ramos invited to do before a September deadline, the judge closed the case in October.

Baldwin paid nothing to resolve the case, his attorney Luke Nikas said Wednesday in an email to The Associated Press.

The case has seen no activity since, according to court documents. Lawyers for both sides, including McCollum family attorney Dennis Postiglione, did not comment further on the case when contacted by email Thursday. Reached by email Wednesday, Postiglione declined to comment and said the McCollum family would not comment.

Rylee McCollum and 12 other Marines were killed in a suicide bombing at the Kabul airport in the last days of the U.S. war in Afghanistan in 2021. Baldwin

sent the family a \$5,000 check to help in the aftermath.

The lawsuit, filed initially in Wyoming and then New York, alleged Baldwin exposed the family to a flood of social media hatred in 2022 by claiming on Instagram that Roice McCollum was an "insurrectionist" for attending former President Donald Trump's Jan. 6, 2021, rally in Washington, D.C., that preceded the insurrection that day.

Roice McCollum protested peacefully and legally, was not among those who stormed the U.S. Capitol, and never was arrested or charged after being interviewed by the FBI, according to the lawsuit.

Even so, she was a "limited public figure" under the law by talking about her brother's death in the news media and by engaging

with Baldwin, a well-known celebrity, on social media, Ramos ruled in dismissing the lawsuit.

To prove her case as a limited public figure, McCollum needed to show that Baldwin acted with malice toward her.

She did not, so Baldwin's comments were protected under his free-speech rights, Ramos ruled.

The lawsuit was filed as Baldwin faced legal peril for the death of a cinematographer on a New Mexico movie set in 2021. Baldwin was pointing a gun when it went off, killing Halyna Hutchins and wounding director Joel Souza.

Special prosecutors initially dismissed an involuntary manslaughter charge against Baldwin but now seek to recharge the actor after presenting new information to a grand jury. □



Alec Baldwin speaks at the Ripple of Hope Award Gala at New York Hilton Midtown on Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021, in New York. (Photo by Evan Agostini/Invision/AP, File)

Nevada fires coach Ken Wilson after two 2-win seasons in his return to Reno

By Mark Anderson
Associated Press

(AP) - Nevada football coach Ken Wilson, who won two games in each of his two seasons after returning to Reno, was fired Friday.

The Wolf Pack went 4-20 under Wilson, and they averaged 18.8 points in his first season and 17.3 this year. Their defense gave up more than 30 points a game both seasons.

"After an extensive review of the Nevada football program, I have decided to make a leadership change," Nevada athletic director Stephanie Rempe said in a statement. "I would like to thank Ken for his dedication and service to Nevada Athletics and to our student athletes. This is not a decision I take lightly, as I know the ripple effect on so many people with a decision like this. For more than two decades Ken and his family have been and will continue to be an integral part of this community and the Wolf Pack."

Wilson was either on Nevada's coaching staff or part of its administration from 1989-2012. He then became the linebackers coach at Washington State from 2013-18 and co-defensive coordinator at Oregon from 2019-21 before returning to Reno. □



Nevada coach Ken Wilson watches from the sideline during the second half of an NCAA college football game against Fresno State in Fresno, Calif., Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023.
(AP Photo/Gary Kazanjian, File)

Oregon State, Washington State, Mountain West agree to 6-game football scheduling arrangement in '24

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

(AP) - Oregon State, Washington State and the Mountain West announced a football scheduling agreement Friday for the 2024 season that gives the two remaining Pac-12 schools six opponents each and positions them to operate as a two-team conference for at least a year.

All 12 Mountain West schools will be involved and Oregon State and Washington State will each play three home games and three road games against members of a conference that includes: Air Force, Boise State, Colorado State, San Diego State, Wyoming, Nevada, UNLV, San Jose State, Utah State, Fresno State and New Mexico. Oregon State and Washington State will pay about \$14 million to the Mountain West next year as part of the agreement, a person with knowledge of the negotiations between the schools and the conference told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the parties were



Oregon State quarterback DJ Uiagalelei (5) walks by the Pac-12 logo and waves to fans after the team's NCAA college football game against Oregon, Friday, Nov. 24, 2023, in Eugene, Ore.
(AP Photo/Mark Ylen)

not immediately disclosing financial terms.

"We are still focused on rebuilding the Pac-12, and continue to prioritize the student-athlete experience at Oregon State," Oregon State athletic director Scott Barnes said.

Barnes said a full football schedule will be released soon and will include five Power Five opponents, six from the Mountain West and one FCS school. For its part, the Mountain West will play a seven-game conference schedule and the games against Ore-

gon State and Washington State will not count in the league standings.

"This is a unique and unprecedented opportunity for Oregon State and Washington State to play against highly competitive Mountain West football programs in 2024," Mountain West Commissioner Gloria Nevarez. She said the agreement expands the conference's footprint and strengthens its non-conference schedules.

"Today's announcement provides both institutions clarity for the 2024 football

season," Washington State President Kirk Schulz said. Oregon State and Washington State are trying to plot a path forward after the Pac-12 was torn apart by conference realignment. Ten Pac-12 schools are joining new Power Five leagues in 2024.

Oregon State and Washington State want to rebuild the Pac-12. NCAA rules allow for a conference to be as small as two schools for a two-year period. There has been speculation about a combination of some kind between the pair and the Mountain West schools and the person with knowledge of the discussions told AP last month that the scheduling agreement could be expanded to other sports, including basketball, as the sides continue to explore options.

The Pacific Northwest schools are currently in a legal battle with the Pac-12 and the 10 departing schools to determine who runs the conference and has control over potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in assets.

It is unclear how the ad-

ditional games could impact the Mountain West's television agreement with Fox and CBS, which runs through the 2025 football season. The Pac-12 has no television contract in place beyond this season. The league's failure to land a deal competitive with other Power Five conferences was a primary factor in the breakup of the Pac-12.

The departures started in 2022 when Southern California and UCLA announced they would join the Big Ten in 2024. The pace picked up this fall.

Oregon State and Washington State sued the Pac-12 and departing members in September, claiming those schools relinquished a right to be on the conference board of directors and vote on league matters when the announced they were leaving.

The exiting schools say they should still be able to vote until they officially leave in August 2024.

Currently, any decisions made in the Pac-12 have to be by unanimous consent of all 12 members. □

European gymnastics federation rejects return of athletes from Russia and Belarus to competition

Associated Press

SOFIA, Bulgaria (AP) — The governing body of gymnastics in Europe voted against allowing Russian and Belarusian gymnasts to return to international competitions, calling into question how they could qualify for next year's Olympics.

The International Gymnastics Federation is allowing Russians and Belarusians to return as "individual neutral athletes" without national symbols from Jan. 1, in line with the International Olympic Committee's recommendations. However, European Gymnastics said its members voted Friday not to comply with that plan.

"The General Assembly of European Gymnastics has voted against allowing athletes and officials from Russia and Belarus to return to official European Gym-



The Olympic rings are seen in front of the Paris City Hall, in Paris, on April 30, 2023.

(AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard, File)

nastics competitions from 1 January 2024 onwards, thus not following the FIG deci-

sion," it said in a statement. The FIG told The Associated Press in an emailed state-

ment that it "takes note of the decision" by European Gymnastics.

"Although this may have an impact on Olympic qualification through continental championships, the FIG cannot provide any further details on this until all the relevant stakeholders have been consulted," it said.

Russia and its ally Belarus have already missed many of the qualification events for Olympic gymnastics since the FIG barred them following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.

The European championships next year were expected to be key opportunities for Russia to qualify gymnasts for the few remaining places at the Paris Olympics. European countries also host some events in the FIG World Cup series, which is another path to qualifying for the Olympics. □

Aston Villa files complaint to UEFA over Legia Warsaw conduct and fan violence

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, England (AP)

— Aston Villa filed a complaint with UEFA on Friday over the conduct of Legia Warsaw officials and the "unprecedented violence" of the Polish team's fans outside Villa Park.

Police arrested 46 Legia supporters after "90 minutes of sustained violence" Thursday night when 1,000 Polish fans arrived to the stadium but weren't given their tickets to the Europa Conference League game.

"This shocking behavior followed Legia club officials' complete lack of cooperation with West Midlands Police, Aston Villa and UEFA throughout the day," the Birmingham club said in a statement Friday.

The Warsaw club had been upset that local officials who license all stadium events required the ticket allocation be reduced from 1,700 to 1,000 in response to disorder by Legia fans at an Oct. 5 game against AZ Alkmaar in the Netherlands.

At a standard pre-match

meeting Thursday morning, "Legia Warsaw refused to confirm if they would accept their allocation of tickets for the match at that point," Villa's statement said. "This is in stark contrast to normal UEFA operational procedures."

The Polish club's officials confirmed at 4 p.m. that they would accept the allocation and then were handed the tickets when they arrived at Villa Park at 6:16 p.m., Villa said.

West Midlands Police said

their investigation will include determining why the tickets weren't distributed, and that they'll pursue charges against those arrested after four officers as well as a police dog and horse were injured in what they described as "planned violence" by the away fans.

"The disorder that we encountered last night was the most severe that a lot of us have ever seen," assistant chief constable Damian Barratt told Talk Sport radio.

"It was undoubtedly, as I say, instigated as a result of this issue related to ticket allocation," he continued. "That's something I'll be taking up with football authorities and UEFA in particular. I will be expecting some strong decisions on their part."

Villa won the game 2-1. The away fans section of the stadium was empty.

UEFA said it "strongly condemns the unacceptable violence" and was "in the process of gathering all official reports from the game before deciding on potential next steps. We have no further information or other comment to make at this stage."

Legia fans were also involved in violent clashes with police during a game at Leicester in 2021.

Legia Warsaw did not return an emailed message Friday seeking comment. On Thursday night, it blamed Villa for "refusing to allocate tickets to away fans."

Barratt described "enormous hostility" among the away fans, some of whom started

fires and threw flares. Police did not indicate that their officers' injuries were serious.

"One officer's fluorescent jacket caught fire after they were hit with a flare. Fortunately his jacket was removed quickly and he was not injured," West Midlands Police said in a statement. "He was later taken to hospital with smoke inhalation after the smoke from the flare made it into his helmet."

Most of the arrests were for violent disorder, four for "possession of a knife/offensive weapon," and four for assaulting emergency workers," police said.

Police confirmed on Friday that all of the arrests were away fans "and we'll be working hard to charge and remand those suspects where we can today."

Chris Heck, Villa's president of business operations, said the club "will be making further representations to UEFA in order to ensure that other clubs and police forces across Europe are not exposed to similar serious safety risks at the hands of Legia Warsaw." □



Legia Warsaw fans are ejected from the home stand by stewards during the Europa Conference League Group E soccer match between Aston Villa and Legia Warsaw at Villa Park, Birmingham, England, Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023.

(Joe Giddens/PA via AP)